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## PIONEER LIFE.

BY BENJAMIN S. PARKER.

### PAPER NO. II.

*The Old-Time Singing Schools; "Missouri Harmony" and Other Singing Books—Debating Clubs, Literary Societies and Other Amusements—Winter Sport—Religious Life and Its Social Side—Notes by the Editor.*

THE old-time singing schools served the double purpose of social gatherings and schools of vocal instruction. In the country such schools were held either at the district school-houses or the local churches of denominations other than the Friends, these at that time opposing musical instruction of every kind. The books used were those devoted to sacred music. Probably the earliest of the music books used in Henry county was the "Missouri Harmony," a book that contained many of the standard hymns which survive from generation to generation with others, the words and music of which are now forgotten. It was written in what was known as "buckwheat" notes, because the characters representing the notes resembled grains of buckwheat, but each differed from the other sufficiently to indicate its name without reference to its position on the staff. The "Missouri Harmony" only used the four syllables, mi, fa, sol, la, repeating them to make the full octave, thus: fa, sol, la, mi, fa, sol, la, fa. When the "Missouri Harmony," which held the field a long time, went out, it was succeeded by either the round note system now in use, the figure note system, or an extension of the system used in the "Harmony," which provided additional characters for the three notes of the octave—do, si, re, the do being repeated to fill out the octave.

In many country neighborhoods the singings occurred on Sunday afternoons. The meetings, however, were not confined to Sundays, as the master found it best to have two or three schools on hand at the same time. Several masters were often running

schools in the same neighborhood, and between these schools there was considerable emulation which sometimes led to a joint meeting where the rival classes, under the leadership of their respective teachers, contested for superiority. The singers were chosen very much as were the spellers at the spelling matches. Judges were selected who were to listen to all the contests, and award the honors. The first class to sing stood and sang two selections, first the notes and then the words. The second class, in like manner, sang the same selections, and then two more. The first class then sang the latter airs and two new ones, and so on till the contest closed. In the midst of every afternoon school there was a recess, which was made good use of by old and young. For pure and wholesome social enjoyment, few recreations surpassed the old country singing-school, and there at the same time were trained many sweet singers for the local churches, as well as for the homes.

In the older books the parts were arranged for treble, or air, answering to the modern soprano, and sung by men as well as women; tenor, or double air, for both men and women, and bass, for men. Baritone and alto were not used. Among the books in use other than "Missouri Harmony" were the "Christian Psalmist," the "Sacred Melodeon," two or three of Dr. Lowell Mason's books (which used the Guidonian system), several of A. D. Filmore's books, and a number of others. The "Christian Psalmist" and Filmore's books were written in the figure system, which was invented by Rev. Thomas Harrison, a teacher. The "Sacred Melodeon" was in the improved "buckwheat" notation.

Among the early singing masters of Henry county were Lee Shelley, afterward sheriff of the county; "Sam" Hill, author of the once popular song with the chorus:

"I am so fond of singing school I can't stay away, oh, I can't stay away,"

and William Cole, a composer of some note. There were also Joseph Rich, Joseph Shawhan, Mason Clift, George R. Pennell, Jacob M. Ward, Benjamin Hawley and others. The most notable of them all, perhaps, was John Wyatt, who possessed a bass voice that would have won him fame had he properly cultivated it and sought his chance instead of contenting himself with country singing-schools at fifty cents per scholar. He

afterward became a hardware merchant at Lewisville, and then a justice of the peace.

The usual charges in these schools were fifty to seventy-five cents per pupil for a term of twelve lessons, and at these rates the classes not infrequently tested the holding capacities of the rooms where they met.

So attractive were these singing-schools that a large percentage of the young Quakers of fifty years ago persisted in taking part in them, despite all the restraints imposed by their people, and to that fact is largely due the changed attitude of the second generation of Friends toward the study of music.

Other social features that combined diversion and social intercourse with a valuable intellectual training were the debating clubs, moot courts, mock legislatures, (1) and literary societies. Men who afterward became prominent in the State's history as politicians, statesmen, orators and thinkers had their beginnings and first fed their aspirations in these neighborhood organizations which stimulated their budding powers. The debating club, moot court and mock legislature afforded excellent practice in impromptu speaking and in parliamentary usage. The moot courts were more common to the smaller villages than to the country or large towns. The popularity of the literary society was general. In the early fifties they became numerous throughout Henry and Wayne counties, and joint meetings were held in which societies from Spiceland, Raysville, Knightstown, Union, Dublin, Richmond and other places took part. The literary club idea, so popular now, seems to have had its origin in the old literary societies or "literaries," and the literary picnics or associations in which they united were very similar to the club federations of the present.

One other form of assemblage that should be mentioned is the picnic, which, except in the form of the *fete champetre*, previously spoken of, did not come in until a few years before the Civil war. The ordinary picnic of to-day has for its object diversion pure and simple, unrelated to any more serious purpose, but originally it was connected with the idea of promoting some moral cause—temperance, the Sunday-schools, etc., or at least it was to celebrate some great day in the calender, such as the

Fourth of July. So imbued were our fathers and mothers with the notion that pleasure and usefulness should be combined that it took them a good while to believe that the social picnic had merits of its own and needed no excuse to justify its existence.

By way of contrast to the summer picnic, mention may be made of the most popular out-of-door winter sport in early Henry county. This was sleighing. Before the protecting forests were cleared away, our winter snows lay upon the ground much longer than they do now, and sleighing was generally indulged in. Every sort of sleigh, sled, spider, jumper or other sliding vehicle took its place upon the highways and contributed its mite to the variety and picturesqueness of the daily show. Almost every man and boy knew how to construct a sled of some kind. The most primitive kind was the hickory jumper. It was often made without a nail, of long hickory poles notched at the proper places to allow the curves and tied to the horse's corn-husk collar. Long pins set in auger holes in the pole runners supported the seat. No harness was used other than the bridle and lines and the collar, to which the pole shafts were tied by strings. The jumper was a mere skeleton of the roughest form, but the sport of riding one was heightened by its crudeness. On the other hand, the fine, strong sleighs made from natural runners and provided with handsome, comfortable bodies and seats by the local workmen, were the pleasantest and easiest-going of all vehicles. People did not then hesitate to start out on sleigh journeys of many days' duration with but little fear of a sudden passing away of the snow. (2)

The various conferences, associations, synodical gatherings and camp and protracted meetings of the various sects represented in the early religious life of Henry county, including the monthly and quarterly meetings of the Friends, were times of reunion among old associates, and for the extension of generous hospitality, and also for a decorous exercise of the social spirit. Visitors to such meetings from a distance were freely entertained by the people who lived in the vicinities of the churches where the gatherings assembled. When the Henry county Quakers went up to Richmond to yearly meeting, they were made at home by the Friends of the town or surrounding farms. As at least three States were represented in these meetings, it

was no small tax upon the generosity of the Richmond Quakers and their neighbors.

A like spirit was manifested by the other sects. Those who were the recipients of such hospitality understood very well that any contributions of provisions they might make would be welcome, but they were welcomed without question when they came empty-handed. The exchange of friendly amenities and the extension of acquaintance served to give the meetings a social value that is lacking in the more formal gatherings of the present day. The summer or autumnal camp-meetings at which families of the same faith collected, from near and far, and dwelt in rough cabins or tents, sometimes for weeks, were not only times of intense religious aspirations and endeavor, but were also social in their character. The well-ordered camp, the cool shades, the meals partaken of in the woods or at a common table, and the hours open to converse and pleasant promenades between the hours of preaching, hymn-singing and worship, were wholly social in their character and effects.

In this connection it may be well to note that many of the religious denominations which are now strong in the county were but little known in its earlier life. As said, the Friends, Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians were the first. After the large immigrations of the thirties set in, the Christians or Campbellites began an earnest work of proselyting and grew rapidly. To the later period, also, belong the United Brethren, German Baptists, Dunkards or Tunkers, Lutherans, Allbrights or German Methodists, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Universalists, Hicksite Friends, Spiritualists, and African Methodists. These have been or are now prominent in the county.

The Dunkards have always been considered a peculiar people, especially in the quaintness of their garb and in the refusal of the men "to mar the corners of the beard," as well as in certain of their religious rites, such as the kissing between the full-bearded brethren, their foot-washings and their making of the Lord's Supper a generous meal. The shad coat, with standing collar, the broad-brimmed hat and the absence of buttons from the clothing are as characteristic of the masculine members of the church as they were of the old-time Quakers. Some Dun-

kards used to discard buttons altogether and fasten their coats and vests with hooks and eyes, which were hidden from view.

EDITORIAL NOTES. 1. An odd diversion that seemed to prevail during the thirties was the "mock legislature." We say prevailed, for though the local histories make very little mention of it, occasional notices in contemporary newspapers indicate that it was popular. A word from some of our older readers describing this institution would be very acceptable. The "Indianapolis Legislature" flourished for several years during the thirties.

2. Mr. Parker omits to mention the "bob-sled" as a very important factor in the enjoyment of winter. As to when the bob-sled was introduced we are not informed, but it is no modern innovation. It consisted of two short pairs of runners set tandem, the front pair responding freely to the tongue like the front wheels of a wagon, thus affording extra length for a sleigh, and at the same time turning with safety. Primarily it was designed for heavy hauling, but it lent itself admirably to social purposes when, surmounted by a big box-bed partially filled with clean straw, it made a snug, warm nest for a dozen or so boys and girls. Probably no social bunch on earth was ever more in hilarious evidence than the jolly bob-sled party of a moonlight night when the big runners sang a song to the crisp snow on the well-beaten road and the mettlesome horses tugged at the taut lines, while their flying hoofs beat a tattoo and the bells jangled merrily. Doubtless the old bob-sled was a potent promoter of the gentler passion and early marriages, for a half-score of buxom damsels and husky swains jumbled together within the compass of a box-bed was a powerful stimulus to love's young dream. In chronicles of the past let not the bob-sled be forgotten. As one appreciative poet sings:

"Good old Mr. Bob-sled,  
Though yer out o' style,  
Still ye've got these other sleds beat a thousan' mile.  
Least that's my opinion,  
An' I'd ort t' know,  
'Cause we was just like kinfolks forty years ago."\*

\*W. M. Herschell.

Another omission of Mr. Parker's is the spelling-school, perhaps the most famous of all the old institutions, and the popularity of which still continues in some districts. The world at large is familiar with Edward Eggleston's description in the "Hoosier Schoolmaster" of a spelling-match. Little perhaps, can be added to that, except that the method of spelling as there given does not correspond exactly to the common method of a later day. There the heads of the classes are pitted against each other and the spelling is confined to them until one misses, when the next in line takes his place. The mode with which we are familiar carries back and forth and down the standing lines from head to foot and back again till the poorer spellers are weeded out and the better following till one side is down. The rivalry and personal ambition and feeling involved in these contests were quite as intense as Mr. Eggleston portrays them, and all participants will recall the excitement and little tremor of dread that always went with the possibility of defeat. No other intellectual practice of our fathers, perhaps, so engendered and fed a desire for neighborhood glory as these trials of orthographic skill, and the cultivation in this direction was quite out of proportion to that of the other branches of the simple country-school curricula. Prompted by the thirst for glory, many a country boy consumed what might be called the midnight tallow at home over his spelling-book with an assiduity that nothing else could have caused. The absolute standard of authority generally recognized was the spelling-book then in use, and any appeal from that to a lexicon where words were spelled more ways than one was considered an unfair subterfuge and was frowned down. The familiarity with the words as arranged in the spelling-book columns was oftentimes amusing, and not infrequently, as we well remember, when the first word was given out and spelled, the following ones were successively tripped off the tongue with a swiftness that left him who pronounced following after, functionless and bewildered, till finally some one failed to remember. The pupils of a school considered the privilege of an occasional spelling bee a vested right, and as a rule the little district schoolhouse was crowded to its limit, not only by the young people who participated but also by their elders, who sat sedately by witnessing with parental pride the performances of their offspring.